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SIPDIS

FOR PRM AND AF FROM AMBASSADOR BRIDGEWATER

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: WEST AFRICAN REFUGEES ON HOLD FOR MATERIAL SUPPORT

¶1. (SBU) Embassy Accra is home base for the Regional Refugee Coordinator Office, which has responsibility for refugee resettlement in 21 countries in West and Central Africa, one of only two such offices in sub-Saharan Africa. We take refugee resettlement issues very seriously and appreciate the efforts currently underway in Washington to grant select refugees relief from the restrictive material support provisions of the Real ID Act, whether through the waiver process or by amended legislation.

116 Persons Impacted in the Region

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¶2. In the region covered by our Ref Coord, there are 116 Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees whose resettlement cases have been placed on indefinite hold, either because they provided material support to enemy combatants (reportedly under duress), or because their case, although approved, is cross-referenced to a case on hold.

¶3. (U) In order to put a human face on these statistics, we would like to highlight the case of one Liberian refugee who epitomizes the sometimes ironic collateral impact of the material support issue. Below is her story. Although it is credible in light of Liberia's history, it has not been independently verified. (To protect her confidentiality, we have used only her initials.)

IK's Story

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¶4. (SBU) IK's village in Liberia was attacked by rebel forces in 2001, after which IK was kidnapped and held prisoner. During this time, she was beaten, raped, and forced to carry food. (Comment: the act of carrying food was considered "material support," thus preventing her resettlement in the U.S.) Mid-way through her captivity, rebels branded her leg with the initials FLF, using a hot knife. IK escaped after 3 weeks, only to witness the killing of her father and brother. Fleeing further into the bush, IK had to serve as an impromptu mid-wife when her mother went into labor and gave birth to twins. Unfortunately, the mother bled to death in IK's arms and the babies passed away shortly thereafter. IK then fled to Guinea, but because of the FLF branding, she was mistaken for being a rebel sympathizer, beaten, and jailed for 10 days. Now living in a camp in Guinea in relative safety, IK still suffers from a severe post-traumatic stress disorder, her son has a medical condition that cannot be treated locally, and her sister struggles with a severe depression that has made her incapable of self-support. IK's case came to our attention through an NGO in 2005 and DHS interviewed her in 2006.

Conclusion

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¶5. (SBU) Although the numbers from our region are not large, post

asks the Department to consider assisting these traumatized refugees, possibly through the option of individual waivers for these 116 persons. We appreciate the Department's consideration of this important issue.

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